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The University of Montana

NEWS RELEASE

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MALTA CONNECTION SPELLS LADY GRIZ SUCCESS

MISSOULA --

by Linda McCarthy
UM Sports Information

Surrounded by wheat fields, Malta is a quiet, sun-baked town, population 2,200, on U.S. Highway 2 along Montana's northern border. It has one main street, two grocery stores and eleven churches.

It is a place where pickups rattle down streets, where farmers and ranchers gather in the Great Northern Coffeeshop. It is also the home of some of The University of Montana's finest women basketball players.

First came Linda Mendel in 1985. Next year, Linda Cummings, one of the state's best girls' basketball players, will arrive. Currently, two top players for the Lady Griz claim Malta as a hometown: Greta Koss, who arrived at UM in 1992, and Skyla Sisco, who came a year later.

Last season, Koss and Sisco racked up twenty-four points, twelve rebounds, six assists and four steals per game, leading the team to a 24-5 record and an eleventh appearance in the NCAA Championship.

"Both Greta and Skyla are great kids and talented basketball players," said women's basketball Head Coach Robin Selvig, another small-town Montana native (Outlook, population 226). "Both work very hard to improve all the time, and they've both been great assets to our program."

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"Coming to Missoula has been a great experience for me," said Koss, a junior who led Montana last season in both scoring and rebounding. She was named the Big Sky Conference's outstanding player after scoring a career-high thirty-two points in Montana's 72-60 title win over Weber State. "Playing basketball for Robin and experiencing the success we've had prepared me to go out and get what I want."

Sisco, a sophomore who secured her second Big Sky all-conference award despite missing the final five games because of a knee injury, said she's "definitely tougher mentally."

In 1995, Sisco was the first freshman in league history to earn first team honors and was named the Big Sky's outstanding sixth player. Last summer she competed in the U.S. Olympic Festival in Denver.

Del Fried, Malta High School's head coach for the last fifteen years, was key to Koss and Sisco's success. Like Selvig, Fried has built a successful tradition of girls' basketball in his community.

"Malta's basketball program is a very good one, obviously," said Selvig. "Coach Fried has produced some talented players, and we've been both lucky and excited to get some of them here."

From 1991 to the present, Malta posted forty-seven straight conference victories and five consecutive conference titles. Last year, despite losing its high school gymnasium to a fire Dec. 24, Malta won both the boys' and girls' state class "B" basketball titles.

"The girls who have been successful here just love the game of basketball and work really hard on it," said Fried, who teaches government, history and geography. "We're fortunate to have basketball players with sound fundamentals up here. But God gave Greta and Skyla some great

abilities, and they just won't accept second best."

Koss and Sisco started playing basketball in fifth grade and, after sharing the court for so many years, have developed an uncanny feel for each other's game.

"I think I know what Greta's going to do with the ball," Sisco said of her college roommate. "I'm sure it's the same with her. Sometimes I'm a little tricky, and people don't know when I'm going to pass the ball or shoot. She knows that better than anyone."

"I've seen Skyla's moves longer than some of the others, so I'm ready for her passes," Koss said. "Skyla's the ultimate point guard. She's a good passer, a good ball handler, and a good scorer. We have a good relationship, and we have good times off the court too."

Both Koss and Sisco carry a 3.6 grade-point average and plan to further their education -- Koss in physical therapy; Sisco in medicine.

Of all the games the two have played together, both chose the 1991 state title game, in which Malta defeated Fairfield 54-52 in double overtime, as their most memorable.

"We both ended up fouling out," Koss said, "so we were sitting the bench praying for our teammates to pull it out."

Sisco says her favorite memories of Malta were nights in the gym with Koss. "We would stay late, just the two of us, shooting half-court shots and goofy lay-ups," Sisco said. "I loved that gym; I loved playing there. We're definitely gym rats. I don't think anyone loves the game more than Greta and I do."

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Select Montana dailies and weeklies; w/pics

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